

July 20, 2023,

via email: dan.ryan@portland.us.gov

Commissioner Dan Ryan
City of Portland
1221 SW 4th Avenue, Room 240,
Portland, OR 97204

RE: DARCELLE XV PLAZA

Commissioner Ryan:

I am writing you as a business neighbor across the street from the Darcelle XV Plaza, a 45-year-long friend of Walter (Darcelle), and a long-time advocate for the Portland LGBTQ community. I'm writing as a park advocate; I coordinated/chaired Friends of O'Bryant Square for eight years. I bring knowledge and history of the West End, the Pink Triangle. My first business in the area was in 1982; my Ski Shop was located at 12th and Burnside; at the time, Stark Street was home to 7 gay bars and a gay men's bathhouse. At a time when O'Bryant Square was used for Gay Celebrations, I also owned the Embers Nightclub and Drag Bar, just a few blocks away. With this background, I participated in the Foundations Back to Square One programs, gaining valuable insights into our community's vision for the park. I also bring to the table experience as a member of the Stakeholders committee for the County's BHRC GNA (which is still in negotiations).

Darcelle XV Plaza will be in transition for 5 to 7 years; our city is also in transition as it struggles with Work from Home, the drug crisis, M110, and of course, the many issues of behavioral and mental health and homelessness. It's this transition period that concerns me regarding the RFI proposals on the table for the temporary park. I have had the privilege to review two, one from Clean & Safe and the other from Keith Jones Cart Blocks / Green Loop group.

The goal for the interim park has been stated as; Cost-effective, putting safety and livability first, and a community activation space to test programs and design for the future. A space that includes Diversity, Equity across the economic spectrum. A park for not just the neighbors but a meeting and gathering place for visitors to our city. With the renaming, there's also the need for the space to honor Darcelle and to connect to Harvey Milk and the Pride Plaza between Southwest 11th and 12th.

After reviewing the two main proposals, please consider and include these aspects in your selection.

- 1) First and foremost is security: A European Style Fenced-in Park with 6 am – 10 pm hours is crucial to the success of the Plaza. In 5 to 7 years, the park might not need a fence, but for the foreseeable future, it's critical. I have spoken to County officials, four major property owners, and three major hospitality groups. All 100% support a fenced secure Plaza during the night.**
- 2) Lighting with Motion: The current proposals lack the visual sense of presence one gets when motion is displayed by lighting. Simple GOBOs or Lasers are needed to show that this park is alive. As Darcelle would say ... It's Show Time!**
- 3) Off-Leash Area: The area hospitality groups all offer travelers pets rooms, many office workers want to take pets to work, and the area SRO residents and the clients of the BHRC during the Back-to-Square-One had this as one of their most important needs.**
- 4) Please limit the Carts or Trucks. Yes, this is part of the Portland culture and across the street from the prior Pod, but times have changed. This plaza should complement the commercial offerings and investments and not compete with them. The new 30-cart pod and beer garden are 1000 feet away at Harvey Milk and SW 5th. In addition, the Flock will open on SW 9th across the street, with 30 local vendors – most POC and Immigrant based.**

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We also have several NEW opening restaurants within three blocks; this includes a large Japanese Raman Shop – direct from Japan and a new food court with four carts on SW 9th. Bottom line, one at the most, two carts are viable and only if selective and a compliment to the other offerings now close by. There is also a major upgrade to the food offering at Pioneer Place, with an internationally known dumpling restaurant opening a 10K sq ft restaurant.

Beyond special events, focusing on carts will likely lead to a failed plaza. But there must also be the option to pivot in the future, so some power and sewer hook-ups for 2 to 4 carts/trucks should be included. Parks should review a year or two after the area's commercial operations are fully developed.

- 5) Activation Testing: During “Back-to-Square-One,” the concept of testing activation models during this temporary phase was well received by the public; now, with the naming, we also have a focused theme. There will be at least a 5-year temporary period that could extend seven years due to park bond funding cycles. We need an organization that can manage this task for an extended time.**

I urge you to select the **Clean and Safe** proposal as a starting point. With their work at Directors Park now underway, this is a solid extension that allows Parks to focus on one provider. It's a solution that will leverage resources and ensure security and livability while meeting to goals of testing concepts of activation and community involvement.

Thank you, Dan, for your leadership and Rand Gragg for the discussions. We have a fantastic opportunity to honor Darcelle and have an amazing community open space.

Best Regards,

Steven Lien
CEO – underU4men
Executive Director – Travel Gay Portland
Chair of Friends of Darcelle XV Plaza

CC: Randy Gragg, Portland Parks Foundation (rgragg@portlandpf.org)
Clean and Safe